

Organized Foxhunting
in America



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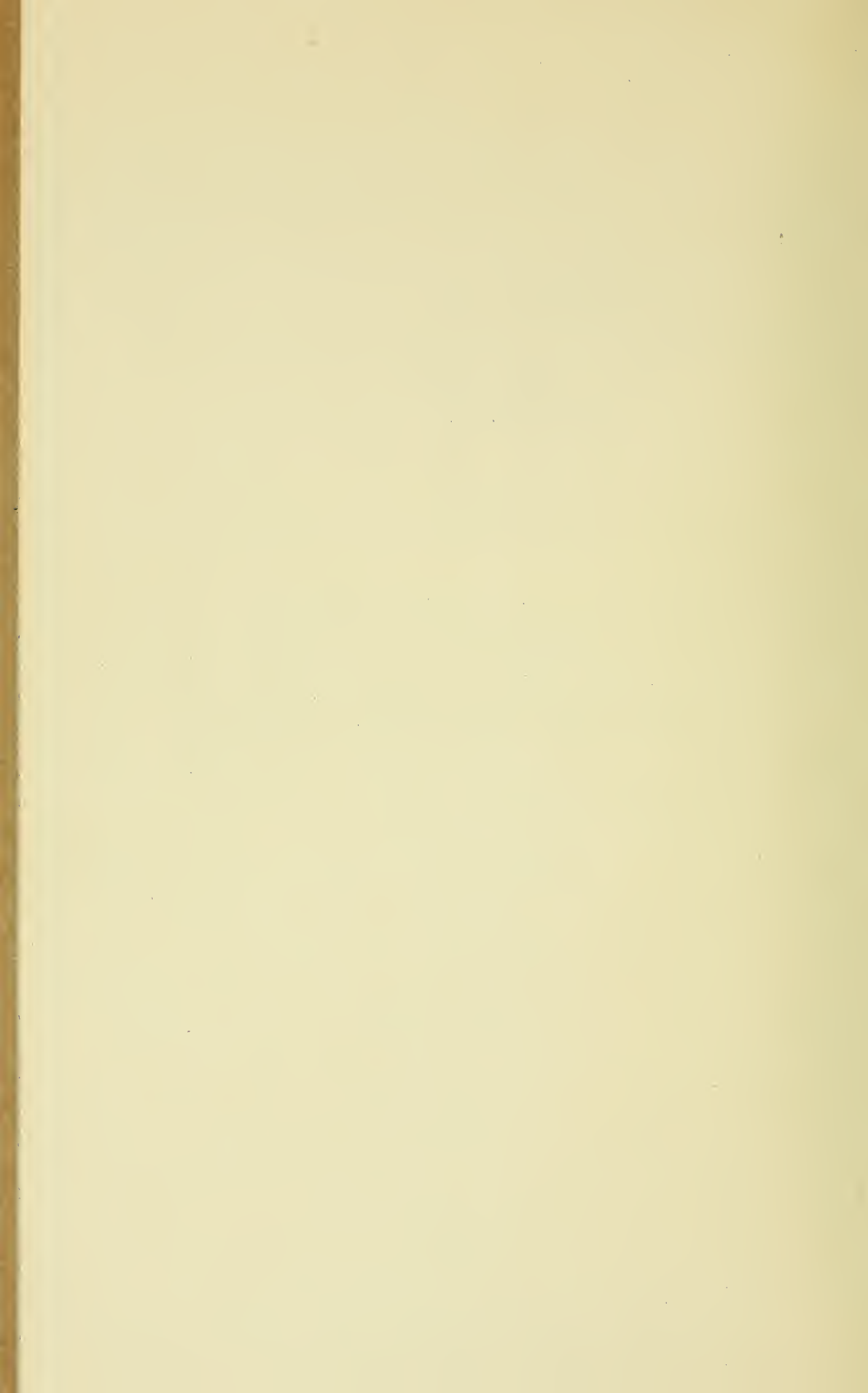
**ORGANIZED
FOXHUNTING
IN AMERICA**

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*This pamphlet is written in the hope that it will
serve as a guide or reference for those wishing to
know more about the type of foxhunting referred
to as "organized" Foxhunting or Riding to Hounds.*



Organized Foxhunting in America

The sport of Foxhunting or Riding to Hounds is a very old sport in America; in fact it commenced in this Country in Colonial Days. George Washington was a keen foxhunter. He kept his own pack of foxhounds at Mount Vernon where many of his friends and neighbors hunted with him regularly. Washington's diary contains many accounts of his days with hounds, with notations as to the number of foxes found, comments on the behavior of individual hounds, and the names of friends who were with him in the field. In fact his diary is very largely the diary of a foxhunter.

Foxhunting has been carried on in America ever since then with modifications in different parts of the country to adapt it to terrain, climate and the preference of participants. It is estimated that some two hundred thousand persons engage in foxhunting in some manner in the United States. A very large number of hunters enjoy the sport in the form of night-hunting on foot, which is usually conducted in a hilly, wooded or even mountainous country that would be unsuited to the mounted form of the sport.

These night-hunters are keen lovers of foxhounds, and have developed a number of strains of American foxhounds noted for endurance and speed. The hounds are owned individually or in small groups, and each owner knows the voice of his own hound or hounds and can tell their position in the

chase as their cry comes to him from afar.

These foxhunters are organized by state and national associations, hold large field trials and bench shows, maintain foxhound stud books, and have a number of publications such as "THE CHASE" published at Louisville, Kentucky, and "THE RED RANGER" published at Rushville, Missouri.

Mounted foxhunting, however, is the only type officially recognized by the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America.

Today there are one hundred and nine organized Hunts recognized by the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America or registered with the Association awaiting recognition. There are twenty-one in Pennsylvania, nineteen in Virginia, nine in New York, eight in Maryland, and the rest are distributed among twenty-one other States except for four in Canada.

In addition to these there are a considerable number of Hunts not affiliated with the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America, including many farmers' packs maintained for mounted hunting.

The organized Hunts fall into two general classifications: the Hunt Club and the Private Pack. The cost of maintaining hounds and other expenses of a Club are met by dues of members and fees of subscribers. Hunt Clubs have officers and committees responsible for details of organization and management. In the case of a Pri-

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vate Pack, however, the hounds are owned by one person or one family that finances and manages the Hunt. In some cases, the owner of a private pack accepts donations from subscribers to a fund commonly known as the Panelling Fund to help defray the cost of maintaining the hunting country.

OBJECTIVE OF THE SPORT

The purpose of organized fox-hunting is to enable a group of mounted followers, collectively called the "Field," to enjoy the sport of riding to hounds.

A DAY WITH HOUNDS

Perhaps the best impression will be gained by describing a typical day with hounds in an average hunting country in America. Such a day might be with one of the larger Hunt Clubs with perhaps a Field of one hundred fifty riders out, or it might be with one of the Private Packs with only ten to twenty followers; or again it might be a bitter cold day in January, with snow on the ground, and only the Hunt staff and a handful of keen foxhunters out to follow the hounds.

Most Hunts mail fixture cards to members and subscribers each month during the season giving the time and place of hunt meets, which are usually held three or four days each week. The duration of the season depends upon the geographical location of the Hunt. In Pennsylvania, for example, cub-hunting commences in late August, and the regular season extends from September 1st or 15th to the end of March. With many

Clubs the hunting is informal in character up to the traditional opening day in early November when it commences in formal manner. The Hunts in the northern States have a shorter season by reason of more severe winter weather and deep snow.

The hunt we shall describe is held on a Saturday in December. The fixture card shows the meet called for ten o'clock at a point say five miles from the kennels.

The hunting horses are usually fed an hour before they are to leave stables, then groomed and saddled. Hounds are not fed until their return to kennels at the end of the day.

The Huntsman and one or two Whippers-in appear mounted at the kennels at nine o'clock to road hounds to the meet. Some Hunts take hounds to and from hunting areas in a motor hound-van, but most Huntsmen prefer the old method if road and traffic conditions permit.

There is but one Huntsman for each pack of hounds. He is the man who manages the hounds in the hunting field, and usually has charge of them in kennels. In some Hunts the Master himself "carries the horn"—that is, acts as Huntsman—but more often the Huntsman is a professional. If the M. F. H. hunts the hounds, there is either a Joint-Master or a Field-master who assumes the important duty of managing the Field.

The Whippers-in, who may be professional or amateur, have the duty of assisting the Huntsman in numerous ways during the course of a day's hunting. Their work is

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very important, and a "Whip" who really knows his business plays a vital part in enabling a pack to show a successful season of sport.

It is needless to say that the Huntsman knows each hound by name, and each hound knows his own name and answers to it. Indeed a good Huntsman knows each hound as well as a mother knows her children. He knows their individual characteristics and abilities, and can usually recognize the voices of individual hounds when they speak in a woodland.

The Huntsman gives the signal, the kennel door is opened, and the hounds rush joyfully out to romp around his horse. The horse is friendly with the hounds. They jump up at him; he lowers his head and nuzzles them. John Jorrocks, the great old sporting character of Surtees' novels, said: "The 'orse and the 'ound were made for each other, and natur' threw in the fox as a connectin' link between the two!"

The pack may consist of anywhere from ten to twenty-five couples of hounds. Hounds are spoken of in "couples" because that is the quickest and most convenient way to count them in the field. It may be wondered why a pack of twenty to fifty hounds should be used to hunt one fox. There are three principal reasons: First: a fairly large pack can spread out over a wider area in "drawing," i. e., trying to find a fox, and consequently may find more quickly than would a few hounds. Secondly: a big pack, provided it is really an evenly matched, well-coordinated one running well together, furnishes the mounted Field with a

better objective for which to ride. Third: the more hounds, the greater the volume of cry, or hound "music," when the pack is on the line of a fox. This, to many foxhunters, is the greatest single pleasure in hunting—hearing the cry of the pack. It is indeed music in the truest sense of the word.

But let's get on to the Meet! The Huntsman speaks to the hounds; they pack up around his horse and set out along the road. A pack of foxhounds should have good road discipline. At the Huntsman's command the hounds should all stay back so that none moves in front of his horse's head. If the road be narrow and a vehicle approach from the rear, the Huntsman trots on to the first driveway or place into which he can withdraw from the road, and every hound should move off with him to allow the vehicle to pass. If he be on an unfrequented road or dirt lane, he may say: "Trot along boys," and many of the hounds will move out ahead of him.

The Huntsman, pack and Whippers-in arrive at the meet at ten. The M. F. H. or the Fieldmaster is there, and the Field are arriving, most of them riding to the meet on their hunters, some in motors to meet their horses which have been ridden or led there or perhaps sent on by motor horse-van. Others may arrive with their hunters in a horse-trailer behind their automobile.

The Master of Foxhounds has no doubt planned in advance, at least in a general way, how that area of country is to be "drawn," i. e. hunted. Such plans are, of course, subject to last minute modifi-

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cations on account of the direction of the wind, condition of the ground, etc.; or perhaps he may learn that a fox has been "viewed" that very morning at some particular spot.

The Master holds a short council with the Huntsman, then looks at his watch, and, having given say five minutes' leeway for late comers, signals the Huntsman to move off to the first "draw," which in this case is a "covert," i. e. a piece of woodland, about a mile upwind from the point at which the meet was held.

As the Huntsman approaches the covert, he sounds a short, sharp note on his horn to warn any fox of the approach of hounds and avoid surprising or "chopping" him. Meanwhile a Whipper-in has moved on at the gallop and posted himself in a strategic position on the far side of the covert from whence he has a chance to view a fox away. The other Whipper-in may accompany the Huntsman through the woodland to put hounds on to him or to stop riot if necessary.

The Field follow the Master outside of the covert, preferably on the down-wind side where they can follow the progress of the "draw" by ear and be ready to ride in the event of a "find." They keep well together to avoid "heading" the fox, i. e., turning him back into the covert when he breaks out of it.

As the Huntsman nears the covert, his hounds still packed up, he gives them a wave of the arm and the command: "Leu-in!" and the pack spreads out on the run and enters the covert on a fairly broad front. They deploy through the

covert, and advance on a line in front of the Huntsman.

As hounds drift into their first covert of the day, there may be a little burst of cry—the result of keenness and enthusiasm. After this, however, no hound should give tongue until he strikes the scent of a fox. A hound that uses his voice to no purpose is a "bab-bler," and any experienced hound that makes a habit of this should be eliminated from the pack.

The Huntsman, however, uses his voice generously while drawing a woodland. It encourages the hounds, helps to get a fox afoot, and tells hounds and Field just where he is.

Perhaps no fox is found in the first covert, and, when the Huntsman comes out into the open at the far end, he may call his hounds to him with a long, slow note of his horn, and then trot on to draw the next covert.

He may, however, decide to draw on over the fields in the hope of finding a fox in the open. Foxes often choose to lie out on a sunny hillside out of the wind, particularly on a cold day in late fall or winter.

The Huntsman allows hounds to spread out ahead of him in a sort of forage line extending say a furlong to either side. He should be able to control them by the direction of his horse and by arm signals.

The Master and Field follow along at a comfortable distance while a Whipper-in may scout ahead and to a flank.

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Soon, perhaps, the Huntsman may see two reliable old hounds, FREELANCE and MELODY, winding a fox. Their noses are to the ground; their sterns are feathering, i. e., their tails are erect over their backs and are waving from side to side. Then MELODY speaks uncertainly; FREELANCE echoes her with a more confident tone. The rest of the pack rush to them. The Huntsman encourages them with: "Hark to MELODY, hark!" and a couple of short, sharp notes of the horn. The pack are on a cold line trying to work up to their fox.

The scent gets stronger and stronger; the pace and the volume of cry improve. The hunters, with ears pricked forward, strain at their bits, eager for a gallop.

Now, on a hilltop ahead, the Whipper-in is seen standing up in his stirrups, holding his hunting cap aloft. He has viewed the fox!

Now the pack really hits the line with a crash of music. The Huntsman blows "Gone Away," a stirring series of long and short notes in rapid succession; the pack is in full cry, and the run has commenced in earnest.

Fences, ditches and streams come thick and fast; the blood of the horses is up, and they outdo themselves to stay with the hounds. Even the more timid riders find themselves clearing obstacles they would not dream of facing in calmer moments.

The speed and duration of the run depend on many things, but

chiefly on scenting conditions, which vary greatly.

On a day when scent lies well and hounds can run with their heads up, a fox will have to seek shelter in an earth in twenty to forty minutes. On a more difficult scenting day, he may lead hounds over the country for several hours, but much of the time the pace will be slower and there will be occasional checks while hounds puzzle out the line.

When hounds are at fault, the Huntsman should make no effort to give them the benefit of his ideas on which way the fox has gone until they have cast themselves in wide arcs to right and front and left. Only when he sees that they have exhausted their own ingenuity should he gently and unobtrusively cast them where he thinks the fox may have gone. Of course, if the pack be making slower and slower time of it on a failing scent, and the Huntsman knows definitely that the hunted fox has been viewed ahead, he will "pick them up" (move them forward at the gallop) and put them on to the hot line.

The line is recovered, and the hunt is on again.

If all goes well, the pack eventually marks its fox to earth, perhaps in an old den under a tree on a hillside. The Huntsman dismounts, cheers his hounds at the earth, and sounds his horn. In due course, hounds are called away to draw for another fox, or, if it be late in the day and all are satisfied, to return to kennels.

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SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

There are few sports, if any, concerning which so many misconceptions are held as mounted fox-hunting.

Three such misconceptions are quite common:

First is the belief the hunted fox is an animal that has been kept in captivity and released for the chase, or, in other words, that most, if not all, foxhunts are "drop hunts." On the contrary, the sport consists of finding a wild fox with hounds in his native environment and hunting him by scent.

The rules of the M. F. H. Association contain a condemnation of the practice of drop hunts.

Such drop hunts, as may occur from time to time, are generally staged at some country tavern by an unorganized group, and the participants are for the most part one-day-a-year foxhunters. Such hunts have nothing in common with the regular fixtures of the organized Hunts, although the former, unfortunately, frequently receive considerable publicity.

A second misconception is the idea that the hunted fox is a frightened, confused creature fleeing in desperate panic from the pack. This is far from a true picture. Those who have had frequent opportunities to observe the hunted fox know that he appears cool, collected and complete master of the situation. He hunts by scent himself and consequently knows just how good or bad the scent may be at any moment, and governs him-

self accordingly. An old campaigner will usually keep about half a mile ahead of hounds and within hearing of their voices.

A third misconception is that the fox is usually, if not invariably, killed, and that if by chance he makes his escape the foxhunters feel cheated. In other words, the idea seems to prevail that foxhunters are out for the blood of the fox and feel frustrated if they don't get it!

Any real foxhunter will brand this idea as silly. He is out to enjoy seeing a pack of hounds at work, hearing their cry, feeling the thrill of a cross-country ride on a good horse, and spending a day in the open in the company of congenial fellow-hunters. If he be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the fox as it breaks covert or tops a hill, it gives the day an added zest.

As a matter of fact, "the kill" in America is the exception rather than the rule. The great majority of runs end in one of two ways: either the fox is lost through failure of scent or is marked to earth in one of the numerous earths or dens, the location of which is well-known to him.

This latter is considered an entirely appropriate finish to a run and every one is well-satisfied—the Huntsman, the Field, the hounds and certainly the fox.

Of course, the Huntsman keenly desires to account for every fox his hounds find, whether by killing him or marking him to earth. A good huntsman never admits a fox to be lost until he has exhausted every effort to recover the line, but, as John Jorrocks said: "It arn't that

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I loves the fox less, but that I loves the 'ound more."

As a matter of fact, most Hunts find, as their season draws on, that two or three well-known, old red foxes are responsible for most of their good runs. Such a fox may be found again and again in the same general locality, and will lead the pack over a route which may conform quite closely to that which he has taken on preceding occasions.

Perhaps the tendency on the part of non-foxhunters to give undue prominence to the "kill" as a typical component of the sport is due to the frequency with which scenes portraying the death of the fox occur in English hunting prints.

In England the fox population is large and must be kept within certain limits, and it is regarded as the duty of each Hunt to account for a sufficient number of foxes each season to accomplish this result in its particular hunting area.

Here in the United States, where conditions are different, the foxes are seldom numerous enough to be a nuisance. Many farmers and orchardists have learned that the fox is a valuable asset because his diet consists mainly of field mice and other crop-destroying rodents. Consequently there is little demand on the part of informed landowners for the destruction of foxes.

THE HUNTING COUNTRY

While there is a vast amount of wooded and mountainous country in the United States suitable for foxhunting of the night-hunting variety, there is only a limited amount of country suited for the mounted form of the sport. Such

a country should preferably be one devoted to agriculture or grazing. It should contain plenty of woodland in which foxes can find cover, but the woodland should not be so large that too much of a day's hunting is spent in it. Rather should the woodland be separated by goodly areas of open country to afford good gallops.

A rolling or undulating country adds beauty and interest, but too steep hills are exhausting to horses.

Climate and soil are also important. There should be sufficient rainfall to provide good scenting conditions as scent rarely lies well in an arid region. Loam is preferable to clay which holds water, and after a rain or a thaw produces days of "deep going" in which horses sink to their fetlocks. Absence of rocky outcrops and rock-strewn fields makes for safe and enjoyable galloping.

SIZE OF COUNTRY

Few people realize the amount of land that must be assigned to a single hunting organization to enable it to furnish good sport. The more days a Pack hunts, the larger should be its country. A four-day-a-week schedule calls for more territory than does a three-day schedule if overhunting of a given area is to be avoided.

About the smallest area in which a Pack might operate with some success would be say five miles square, which is twenty-five square miles or sixteen thousand acres. It will be seen, however, that a fox found in the center of such a small district could only run about two and a half miles in any direction

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before he would take hounds out of their allotted territory—not much of a run.

A ten-mile square, or one hundred square miles or sixty-four thousand acres, would be better, but by no means ideal. As has often been remarked: "The fox is a toddlin' animal.

FOX POPULATION

A country may combine all of the desirable characteristics to qualify as perfect for mounted foxhunting, but all becomes as Dead Sea fruit if the country does not hold a reasonable population of foxes. A day in which no fox is found is called a "blank day," and an occasional one is to be expected in the best of countries. As in any field sport, it is the uncertainty which gives it zest. Too many blank days, however, are discouraging to Hunt staff and Field and ruinous to hounds.

Moreover, as previously indicated, the most vital need is a supply of seasoned foxes, that is foxes of several years' experience. It is such foxes that furnish the really satisfactory runs, and enable a Pack to show a season of successful sport.

LANDOWNER RELATIONSHIP

It is obvious that the territory needed for successful foxhunting is so large that generally but a small part of it is owned by the Hunt or by Hunt members. Ownership usually vests in many persons, and their permission to hunt over their properties must be secured and maintained.

As foxhunting exists only by virtue of landowners' permission, it is

incumbent upon every foxhunter to see that this permission is in no way abused, and that the interests of the landowners over whose property the Hunt rides be guarded most scrupulously. Gates, if opened, must be closed; fences, if damaged, must be repaired and livestock protected.

Since foxhunting is a rural sport, it is natural that many farmers and landowners should participate. A foxhunting community furnishes the farmers with a good market for their grain, hay, straw and horses.

PANELLING

Before the advent of wire fencing and before the chestnut blight had destroyed the trees most suitable for timber fences, hunting was carried on over a "natural" country fenced with timber. It was then possible for one mounted on a good jumper to stay with hounds wherever the run might lead, and no special preparation of the country was required.

In most hunting countries today, however, the prevalence of wire fencing necessitates the erection of jumpable panels of post and rail or board fence to make mounted hunting possible. Such panels are, of course, built with the permission of landowners.

In some instances structures known as "Chicken Coops," made of timbers faced with boards, are erected over the wire, or panels of logs are built in.

Moreover, as it is unsafe to jump onto or off a hard surfaced road, it has been found necessary to erect panels in fences adjoining such roads in a form known as "set-

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ins;" that is, the panels are set back from the road a sufficient distance to afford room for take-off or landing by the horses.

All of this, of course, has added greatly to the expense of maintaining a hunting country, and, even in a country which has been very well panelled, the hunts are by no means as enjoyable as they were in the "natural" countries of former days.

DRESS

In view of the fact that the sport of foxhunting is centuries old, it is not surprising that like other sports it has developed a distinctive type of dress or uniform best fitted to the needs of its participants.

The formal hunting attire of the present day, while having its roots in tradition, is essentially the result of practical consideration of comfort, usefulness and safety.

Upon examination it will be found that there is a functional reason for the type and design of each item of dress or equipment common to the hunting field.

This is noted first of all in head-gear. The hunting cap worn by the Hunt staff, the top hat worn by members of the Field when turned out in "pink" and the hunting derby are all especially constructed to withstand blows from tree limbs or to cushion the wearer's head in event of a fall.

The scarlet hunting coat is visible for a long distance, and so is of help to the Field in keeping the Huntsman in sight while he is drawing, as well as to enable a rider who has fallen behind in a run to catch a distant glimpse of

the others ahead with the hounds, and to set his course accordingly.

Scarlet hunting coats, moreover, add a certain gaiety to the hunting field which is part of the spirit of the sport. The word "pink," by the way, does not refer to the color of the coat, but is a term applied to the state of being formally attired for hunting. It is thought to have had its origin in a tailor by the name of Pink who, in the old days, is supposed to have made the most perfect attire for hunting.

Similar practical reasons could be given for the material, cut and design of all other items of dress, such as the hunting "stock" or neckpiece, gloves, breeches, boots, etc.

The degree of formality or informality in dress varies considerably in different Hunts, and for the most part is determined by the preference of each individual member of the Field.

In most Hunts, however, there will be found a fair number of followers—local farmers and others—whose costume will be most informal and simple, but nonetheless conforming to requirements of utility and safety.

However informal may be the preference of the members of a Hunt in the matter of dress, it is highly desirable that the Hunt staff be properly uniformed and equipped. This has a definite effect upon their efficiency in the hunting field, just as a uniformed baseball team acquires a certain cohesion and *esprit de corps* superior to that of the sand-lot nine.

A Hunt need not adopt the scarlet coat, but may turn out its staff in whatever color it may prefer.

